California Department of Social Services
Children and Family Services Division

Child Welfare Services System Improvements
11 County Pilot Evaluation

Request for Application (RFA)

The California Department of Social Services is initiating an evaluation of the process and outcomes of the implementation of the Child Welfare Services System Improvements in eleven pilot counties.

Background

In 2000, the California Legislature created a statewide Child Welfare Stakeholders Group to review the state's child welfare system and make recommendations for improvement and change. Over a three-year period, the stakeholders forged a blueprint for overhauling the system, concluding its work in 2003.

As the state oversight agency, CDSS selected 11 counties to begin piloting some of the system improvements identified in the Stakeholders report. The idea was for these counties to become laboratories for child welfare practice, developing and testing the strategies as well as evaluating outcomes. In 2004-05, the new Administration focused on three specific CWS System Improvement activities for implementation.

- **Statewide Safety Assessment** - developing a standardized safety assessment process to ensure the consistent evaluation of risk from county to county, social worker to social worker, and child to child

- **Differential Response** - working with community organizations to develop a broader set of responses when child welfare agencies receive reports of possible abuse or neglect, including prevention and early intervention, engaging families to address issues of safety and risk, and improving access to a broad range of services for families who are formally involved in the child welfare system and those who choose to participate voluntarily

- **Permanency and Youth Transitions** - including youth, extended family and community partners in decision making and case planning in order to create more permanent homes and lasting relationships for foster youth and ensure their successful transition to adulthood

1

To provide statewide consistency and the foundation for additional counties to implement these changes in the future, CDSS and the 11 pilot counties formed workgroups to develop conceptual frameworks that provide detailed guidelines and protocols for each set of improvements. The pilot counties are now using these frameworks as a basis for implementation, tailoring their approaches to meet local needs and to test specific changes with targeted client populations.

The Child Welfare Service System Improvement Evaluation

After the first year of the 11 pilot counties implementation of the CWS Improvements, CDSS seeks to engage a contractor who will collect, analyze and evaluate the data from these counties. The goal of the evaluation is to assess the:

- general implementation process of the CWS System Improvement activities

- specific outcomes as they relate to data collected for families and children impacted by the three improvement activities

- combined effects of the improvement activities including barriers and challenges

- implementation process from the perspective of community, service systems, agency, staff, partners and clients

The information gathered will be used to determine needed changes in practice, statute and regulations, and to develop the best strategies to take the improvements to scale statewide.

Both survey and data analysis methodologies will be employed to conduct the evaluation. The survey portion will rely on county specific information and the data collection portion will include data retrieval from statewide systems.
The information collected will be utilized to establish a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the three Child Welfare Improvement strategies, identify baseline performance data, and establish an on-going performance evaluation process.

A joint committee of state and county staff met to develop an evaluation plan and have identified a wide range of evaluation questions that are included in the attached CWS System Improvement Evaluation Plan document, along with information about data sources for this evaluation.

Deliverables

The project is envisioned in two phases. The initial phase will entail capturing anecdotal information and baseline data as well as some recommendations for system improvements to inform state policymakers in budget development.

The second phase will encompass all the necessary research activities to produce an evaluation and a report of the implementation of Child Welfare System Improvements in the 11 pilot counties.

<u>Final Evaluation Report</u> must include:

- Anecdotal descriptions and numbers of families served in pilot counties

- Available baseline data

- Description of the implementation process of the child welfare services improvements and any barriers encountered

- Recommended changes in practice, statute and/or regulation which would remove barriers and facilitate further implementation

- Data Analysis of baseline data elements across time

- Combined Effects of Multiple Program Implementation

- Conclusions and recommendations

- A proposed on-going evaluation process

The final evaluation report must be submitted to CDSS no later than **September 30, 2007.**

Level of Funding and Funding Cycle

Funds have been appropriated in the amount of $250,000. Funds will be distributed at the end of each phase upon completion of the deliverables.

Application Guidelines

Timeline

- Release of Request for Application: March 1, 2006
- Submission Deadline: 4:00 P.M., April 3, 2006
- Vendor Selection: May 1, 2006
- Project Start Date: July 1, 2006

Eligible Applicants

Entities responding to this RFA will be considered if they are either consultants on the state's master contractor list or public institutions of higher learning.

Selection Process

The application will be evaluated on an agencies history and capacity to conduct the described evaluation, the proposed evaluation process, and the cost associated with each deliverable. The selection process will be based on the points as indicated below. A review team comprised of representatives from California Department of Social Services and representatives identified by Child Welfare Director's Association. The review team's selection decision will be final.

Application

The application should include the following sections and information:

1. Organization Information: (5 Points)
   - Background information on organization/agency including contact information

2. Capacity: (25 Points)
   - Internal capacity of your organization to conduct the evaluation
   - Depth of knowledge of Child Welfare Services and Programs
   - External reputation and related activities of your organization as it relates to system evaluations

3. Research Design (35 Points)
   - Detailed narrative description of the process and approach you will employ to conduct the evaluation
   - Timeline for evaluation activities

4. References: (20 Points)
   - List of related evaluation/past work
   - Three professional references for work on similar projects

5. Budget: (15 Points)
   - Detailed costs of project by phases

Technical Requirements
   - The Application narrative may not exceed 15 pages in length and must address the first three sections above.
   - The reference information may not exceed one page and is to include a list of prior related evaluations (do not include copies of prior evaluations/projects) and contact information for professional references.
   - There is no limitation on the number of pages for the budget section; budget and budget justification to be formatted in accordance to the sample provided (Attachment A).

Applications that fail to comply with the technical requirements will not be considered for funding.

Five copies of the completed application must be submitted no later than 4:00 PM on April 3, 2006 to:

> CDSS
> 744 P Street, MS11-83
> Sacramento, CA 95814
> Attention: Amelia Perez-Gutierrez

Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

Attachments:
A. Notes from June 18, 2005 meeting on CWS Systems Improvement Evaluation Plan
B. Budget and Budget Justification Format

CWS SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT EVALUATION PLAN
Notes from June 18, 2005 Meeting

I. General Evaluation Questions

1. Has implementation of child welfare improvement activities occurred as planned?

2. Has implementation of child welfare improvement activities begun to improve outcomes for children, specifically:
   - Reduced the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system?
   - Reduced the number of children who must be removed from their families to assure their safety?
   - Reduced the number of children who experience repeated abuse and neglect?
   - Reduced instability in foster care placements for children who can not remain safely at home with their families?
   - Reduced the amount of time it takes for children to be safely reunited with their families?
   - Reduced the number of children who ultimately return to foster care?

3. What factors affected the success of counties' implementation efforts and their ability to improve outcomes?

4. What recommendations can be made to guide future implementation efforts in these counties and in other counties across the state?

II. Outcome Evaluation Questions

Improvement Action Step 1:   Safety and Risk Assessment System

1. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system reduced the number and percent of substantiated referrals? (Participation rate)

2. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system reduced the number and percent of subsequent substantiated allegations? (1A, 1B)

3. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system reduced the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and were abused by a foster parent? (1C)

4. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system reduced the number and percent children who remained at home with their parents and experienced a subsequent substantiated allegation within one year? (2A)

5. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system reduced the number and percent of children who were reunified with their families and then re-entered foster care within one year? (3F, 3G)

6. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system increased the number and percent of children who returned home to their parents within one year? (3E, 3A)

7. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system increased the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and were adopted within two years? (3D, 3A)

Improvement Action Step 2: Differential Response

1. Has implementation of differential response reduced the number and percent of children entering care? (Participation rate)

2. Has implementation of differential response reduced the number and percent of subsequent substantiated allegations? (1A, 1B)

3. Has implementation of differential response reduced the number and percent of children entering foster care placement? (not a 636 measure, but requested by the work group. I don't understand why this is not also a question for safety and risk assessment)

4. Has implementation of differential response reduced the number and percent of children who remained at home with their parents and experienced a subsequent substantiated allegation within one year? (2A)

5. Has implementation of differential response reduced the number and percent of children who were reunified with their families and re-entered foster care within one year? (3F, 3G)

Improvement Action Step 3: Team-based Case Planning

1. Has use of Team Decision-Making (TDM) reduced the number and percent of children entering care? (Participation rate)

2. Has use of TDM reduced the number and percent of children entering foster care placement? (not a 636 measure but I added it as a companion to the DR measure)

3. Has use of TDM increased the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and returned home to their parents within one year? (3E, 3A)

4. Has use of TDM increased the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and were adopted within two years? (3D, 3A)

5. Has use of TDM increased the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and experienced no more than two placements? (3B, 3C)

6. Has use of TDM increased the number and percent of children in foster care placed in least restrictive care settings? (4B)

7. Has implementation of TDM reduced the number and percent of children who were reunified with their families and re-entered foster care within one year? (3F, 3G)

Combined Effects of Improvement Action Steps on Outcomes

1. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system and differential response reduced the number and percent of subsequent substantiated allegations? (1A, 1B)

2. Has implementation of differential response and TDM reduced the number and percent of children entering foster care placements? (Also a question for safety and risk assessment? Maybe analysis of the combined effects should be tied to 4B?)

3. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system and implementation of TDM reduced the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and were abused by a foster parent? (1C)

4. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system and implementation of differential response reduced the number and percent of children who remained at home with their parents and experienced a subsequent substantiated allegation within one year? (2A)

5. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system and TDM increased the number and percent of children who entered foster care and experienced no more than two placements? (3B, 3C)

6. Have any and/or all combinations of the safety and risk assessment system, differential response, and TDM reduced the number and percent of children who were reunified with their families and re-entered foster care within one year? (3F, 3G)

7. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system and TDM increased the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and returned home to their parents within one year? (3E, 3A)

8. Has use of the safety and risk assessment system and TDM increased the number and percent of children who entered a foster care placement and were adopted within two years? (3D, 3A)

III. Process Evaluation Questions

<u>Questions for All Improvement Activities</u>

Evaluate the following questions from community, service systems, agency, staff, partner and client perspectives:

1. What steps did each of the eleven pilot counties take to plan and implement the three improvement actions in each?
   - Readiness
     - What was the baseline (structures, practices in place)
     - How was the decision to volunteer to be a pilot county made (who participated, what factors affected decision)
   - Process
     - Approach/Strategies – who led the effort, how/why were they selected, what activities or steps were taken (i.e., who participated and why (integrated with SIP, other efforts?), outreach, education, training, meetings, program/policy changes, monitoring/evaluation, contracts, partnerships, etc – intangibles and tangibles)
     - Goals and Objectives – how defined, how these were intended to structure subsequent activity
     - Products - new partnerships, collaboratives, committees, plans, service structures, programs, policies, protocols, MOUs, contracting formats/agreements, (anything tangible)
   - Staffing – existing, new (FTEs, CWS, other public, private, volunteer)
   - Additional, new resources used and requested to support effort:

o   Assess all county, state and private resources used and requested to achieve goals and implement objectives (analyses, plans, budgets, grants)
o   Assess staffing and financial plan – including full-time, part-time, volunteer staff, consulting support; start-up, operating, capital costs - other resources
- Timelines
- Address any rule, policy or statutory change required to objectives/action steps
- Training

2. In the 11 pilot counties, have each of the three improvement actions been implemented as intended?
    - To what degree (based on cohort agreement and specific county goals, plans, timelines)
    - What worked well
    - Challenges/barriers

3. What resource gaps affect implementation of each improvement activity?
    - For each county
    - For the group as a whole

4. In what important ways is the experience in each of the 11 pilot counties similar? Different?

5. What implications do lessons learned have for:
    - continuing existing implementation activities in each county
    - taking implementation efforts to scale in each county
    - spreading implementation efforts to other counties across the state?

6. What strategies have been used to improve family engagement, and which have been most effective?

7. What recommendations can be made to guide future implementation activities?

Specific Questions for DR and Case Planning

1. How has community partnership capacity been developed?

2. How have community resources been successfully engaged and/or utilized in the differential response and case planning improvement activities?
    - Identify types and levels of resources (from CW service system to grass roots)
    - Identify purpose of engagement and role (initial and any change)
        o   Planning
        o   Implementation/service delivery (type)
    - Methods of engagement
        o   Cooperation/collaboration
        o   Contracting
        o   Leveraged
    - Successful methods
    - Barriers

Specific Questions for Case Planning

1. What strategies have counties used to implement the state protocols to increase family participation and youth inclusion in case planning?

2. What impact has implementation of TDM, family participation and youth inclusion protocols been on case planning processes? As demonstrated by file review
   - Increased number of signed case plans
   - Increased voluntary service cases
   - Increased completion of case plan objectives

IV. Data Sources

Possible Existing Automated Sources
CWS/CMS
TDM database
AB636 data base(s)
Other CWS databases
Other county databases (centralized IT dept, other county departments)
Other state legacy systems
Financial data
Nonprofit service provider data

Additional Sources
County Redesign Readiness Assessments and Plans
County Self Assessments and SIPs (PQCRs?)
State Workgroup products
County plans, policies, protocols
State PIP
Other state documents (CMS project – pending app releases, etc)

V. Data Collection Methods

Quantitative
Extracts - State/County MOUs

Qualitative
Document review
Observation
Case study
Interviews
Questionnaires, surveys
Focus groups

VI. Analytic Methods

Address questions about action steps (program interventions) using appropriate comparison groups and analytic methods:

Comparisons
   - Within county
   - Across pilot counties
   - Between pilot and non-pilot counties

Interactions

- Single intervention => multiple outcomes
- Multiple interventions => single outcome
- Multiple interventions => multiple outcomes

Case mix
- Relevant time dimensions
  - Decision point in child welfare case
  - Placement episode
  - Life of child welfare case
  - Specific measure/dimension over time
- Client populations
  - Age
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Language
- Geographic location
- Allegations
- Service type
- Program participation
  - Parent
  - Youth
  - Partners (community, agency, foster parent)

Budget
Child Welfare Services System Improvements
Evaluation of 11 Pilot Counties

Deliverable: Interim Report

1. Assessment and Analysis

   (Line item of expenses associated with completion of deliverables)

   Example:

Data Collection	XXX
Content Development	XXX
Staff	XXX
Travel	XXX
Etc.	XXX
Cost	**XXX**
Total Cost	**XXX**

Deliverable: Final Evaluation Report

1. Report on the CWS Improvement Activities of the 11 Pilot Counties

   (Line item of expenses associated with completion of deliverables)

   Example:

Data Collection	XXX
Content Development	XXX
Staff	XXX
Travel	XXX
Etc.	XXX
Cost	**XXX**
Total Cost	**XXX**

Total Evaluation Budget

Budget Narrative
Child Welfare Services System Improvements
Evaluation of 11 Pilot Counties

Provide a narrative description and justification of the expenses in the line item budget.